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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EDUCATING ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS IN THE NORTH

REF: A. 01 HANOI 3302 B. 01 HANOI 2963

1. (U) SUMMARY. THE GVN HAS MADE, AND CONTINUES TO MAKE, CONCERTED EFFORTS TO EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE NATION, NOT ONLY TO UNIVERSALIZE EVER-HIGHER
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LEVELS OF EDUCATION BUT ALSO TO PROVIDE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES. SPECIAL PROGRAMS HAVE SET UP A SERIES OF SCHOLARSHIPS, FREE BOARDING SCHOOLS, AND POTS OF MONEY FOR INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED TO SCHOOLS AND OTHER LOCAL NEEDS FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES. OFFICIALS ON THE GROUND STRUGGLE WITH LIMITED RESOURCES, HOWEVER, AND OFTEN ARE UNABLE TO MEET GOALS RELATED TO USE OF MINORITY LANGUAGE AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL, OR COMPUTER TRAINING AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL. END SUMMARY.

PRIORITY ON PAPER

2. (U) EDUCATION IN GENERAL, AND FOR ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS SPECIFICALLY, EMERGED AS A PRIORITY ISSUE DURING THE ONGOING 2ND SESSION OF THE 11TH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ALONG WITH OVERALL EFFORTS TO ASSIST "DISADVANTAGED" AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS. MINISTER OF FINANCE NGUYEN SINH HUNG ANNOUNCED IN PARTICULAR THAT INVESTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER PROGRAM 135 IN 2003 WILL RISE TO BETWEEN 800 MILLION DONG (USD53,000) AND 1 BILLION DONG (USD67,000) IN EACH REMOTE COMMUNE IN MOUNTAINOUS AREAS, UP FROM 500 MILLION DONG (USD33,000) IN 2002. (ABOUT 2000 COMMUNES AND VILLAGES IN CAO BANG AND BAC KAN PROVINCES, VISITED BY POL/C AND FSN NOVEMBER 19-22, ARE ELIGIBLE UNDER THIS PROGRAM, ACCORDING TO OFFICIALS AT THE ETHNIC MINORITIES COMMISSION, ALTHOUGH THESE PROVINCES HAVE ONLY 10 AND 22 ONGOING PROJECTS, RESPECTIVELY.)

3. (U) ARTICLE 36 OF THE VIETNAMESE CONSTITUTION NOT ONLY
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SPECIFIES "PRIORITY INVESTMENT TO EDUCATION" BUT ALSO RESERVES SPECIAL PRIORITY FOR "EDUCATIONAL WORK IN THE HIGHLANDS, IN REGIONS INHABITED BY NATIONAL MINORITIES, AND IN REGIONS ENCOUNTERING SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES." ARTICLE 4 ENSHRINES THE RIGHT FOR EVERY NATIONALITY TO "USE ITS OWN LANGUAGE AND SYSTEM OF WRITING," AS WELL AS "TO PRESERVE ITS NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PROMOTE ITS FINE CUSTOMS, HABITS, TRADITIONS AND CULTURE." IN PRINCIPLE, ACCORDING TO THE ETHNIC MINORITIES COMMISSION, EDUCATION AT THE ELEMENTARY-LEVEL SHOULD BE BOTH IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE AND VIETNAMESE, WHILE SWITCHING EXCLUSIVELY TO VIETNAMESE AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL-LEVEL AND ABOVE.

4. (U) THE SIXTH PLENUM OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM'S (CPV) 9TH CONGRESS IN SUMMER 2002 HIGHLIGHTED EDUCATION, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE "TRAINING OF ETHNIC MINORITY PERSONNEL" AND A REMINDER THAT "STUDENTS IN THE HIGHLANDS, REMOTE AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS ARE ENTITLED TO RECEIVE FREE EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS WELL AS TEXTBOOKS."

OVERSIGHT FROM HANOI

15. (U) OFFICIALS FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING (MOET) DESCRIBED TO POL/C A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS, BEGINNING ESPECIALLY WITH 1991'S PROGRAM SEVEN, DESIGNED TO PROMOTE EDUCATION IN REMOTE AREAS AS WELL AS TO BRING MORE REMOTE STUDENTS INTO ACCESSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. MAIN GOALS ARE FIRST TO ENSURE THAT ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS CAN BENEFIT FROM UNIVERSAL PRIMARY
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EDUCATION (MOET OFFICIALS ADMIT THAT, AS OF NOW, ONLY ABOUT 80 PCT OF ETHNIC MINORITY ELEMENTARY-AGE STUDENTS ATTEND SCHOOL, DESPITE THE GVN'S CLAIM TO HAVE ACHIEVED UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION ALREADY) AND LATER TO MEET THE GVN TARGET OF UNIVERSAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL (9TH GRADE) EDUCATION BY 2010. "BASICALLY, WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT ETHNIC STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO STUDY TO JUST AS HIGH LEVELS AS KINH" STUDENTS, ACCORDING TO ONE OFFICIAL. MOET'S VICE DIRECTOR FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION NOTED THAT THE GVN SOUGHT TO ENSURE "EQUALITY EDUCATION" FOR ALL STUDENTS, REGARDLESS OF ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND PROVINCE OF RESIDENCE. OFFICIALS ADMIT THAT CHALLENGES INCLUDE NOT ONLY THE REMOTE LOCATIONS, DIFFICULTIES IN RECRUITING QUALIFIED TEACHERS, AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS, BUT ALSO THE REALITY THAT MANY MINORITY FAMILIES THEMSELVES HAVE YET TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY FOR THEIR DAUGHTERS.

16. (U) TO PROMOTE HIGHER EDUCATION, BOARDING SCHOOLS AT THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH LEVEL LEVELS EXIST IN MOST PROVINCES WITH HIGH ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATIONS (REF A); ACCORDING TO MOET, THERE ARE 109 ETHNIC HIGH SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE. ETHNIC STUDENTS WHO ATTEND ALSO RECEIVE STIPENDS OF AT LEAST 60,000 DONG/MONTH (USD 4), AS WELL AS FREE ROOM AND BOARD AND TUITION. THERE ARE EXTRA STIPENDS FOR THOSE WITH OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE. ETHNIC MINORITY

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SIPDIS

STUDENTS ALSO MAY STUDY TUITION-FREE AT UNIVERSITY IF THEY QUALIFY; MOET OFFICIALS SAID THAT THESE STUDENTS ARE GIVEN "PRIORITY IN TESTING," I.E., THEY CAN OFTEN QUALIFY WITH LOWER TEST RESULTS. THERE ARE ALSO "SPECIAL COURSES" TO HELP THEM PREPARE BOTH FOR THE EXAMINATIONS AND FOR
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UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM, ACCORDING TO MOET. MOET'S HOPE, ACCORDING TO ITS STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICIALS, IS THAT ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS WILL RETURN TO THEIR HOME AREAS ONCE THEY HAVE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY, IN MOST CASES TO BECOME LOCAL CADRES.

17. (U) OFFICIALS AT THE ETHNIC MINORITIES COMMISSION NOTED THAT CAO BANG PROVINCE HAD THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF ETHNIC MINORITY RESIDENTS -- 96.07 PCT OF THE POPULATION -- WHILE ANOTHER EIGHT PROVINCES HAD MORE THAN 50 PCT ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATIONS. (ALL ARE IN THE NORTH AND NORTHWEST HIGHLANDS, EXCEPT KON TUM IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, WHERE THE POPULATION IS 53.02 PCT ETHNIC MINORITIES). THEY CONFIRMED THAT ONLY ABOUT 80 PCT OF ELEMENTARY-AGE STUDENTS IN THESE TWO PROVINCES ATTEND SCHOOL SO FAR, WHILE CLAIMING THAT ALL VILLAGES IN CAO BANG AND BAC KAN NOW HAVE ELECTRICITY AND HEALTH CENTERS (AS IMPROBABLE AS THIS SOUNDS), WITH ABOUT 90 PCT OF VILLAGES REACHABLE BY ROAD AND HAVING POST OFFICES.

ON THE GROUND REALITIES: CAO BANG

18. (U) ACCORDING TO CAO BANG PROVINCIAL VICE CHAIRMAN HOANG VAN KHOI, THE PROVINCE WAS "VERY CONCERNED" WITH EDUCATION, AND HAD REACHED UNIVERSAL ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN 1979 (CONTRARY TO ASSERTIONS IN HANOI -- SEE ABOVE). HE ADMITTED THAT ONLY ABOUT 37 PCT OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AGE RESIDENTS WERE IN SCHOOL AS OF 2002, HOWEVER. HE DESCRIBED THE SYSTEM OF SIX BOARDING SCHOOLS -- FIVE AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL-LEVEL AND ONE AT THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL-LEVEL - UNCLASSIFIED

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- THAT PROVIDE FREE EDUCATION, ROOM, BOARD, BOOKS, NOTEBOOKS, AND OTHER SUPPLIES TO THEIR STUDENTS. ABOUT 16 PCT OF CAO BANG FAMILIES LIVE BELOW THE GVN POVERTY LEVEL, DOWN FROM 20 PCT IN 1999, VICE CHAIRMAN KHOI ASSERTED.

19. (U) DESPITE CONSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER ADMONITIONS TO EMPLOY LOCAL LANGUAGES WHEN POSSIBLE, CAO BANG ONLY HAS "SOME" ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS THAT OFFER THE DUAL LANGUAGE TRACK, KHOI (HIMSELF AN ETHNIC TAY) ADMITTED. HE CLAIMED THAT CHILDREN COULD "LEARN THEIR LOCAL LANGUAGE AT HOME." TEACHERS WHO DO NOT COME FROM THE SAME LOCAL ETHNIC MINORITY ARE NOT GIVEN LANGUAGE TRAINING, BUT "PICK UP THE LOCAL LANGUAGE ON THEIR OWN," HE ADDED. HE NOTED THAT MALE/FEMALE STUDENT RATIOS WERE ABOUT EVEN, AND CLAIMED THAT ATTITUDES TOWARD THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION DEPENDED LESS ON ETHNIC MINORITY THAN ON ECONOMIC/EDUCATIONAL STATUS: BETTER OFF, BETTER EDUCATED RESIDENTS OF ALL ETHNIC GROUPS TENDED BETTER TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

110. (U) AS ELSEWHERE IN VIETNAM, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS BECOMING MORE IMPORTANT IN CAO BANG. VICE CHAIRMAN KHOI SAID THAT THE PROVINCE NOW HAS THREE VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS -- TWO AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL, AND ONE IN THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL -- BUT ADDED THAT REGULAR SCHOOLS INCREASINGLY ALSO OFFERED CRAFT TRAINING SUCH AS CARPENTRY, SEWING, ELECTRICITY, ETC.

111. (U) THE PRINCIPAL OF CAO BANG'S SENIOR HIGH-LEVEL BOARDING SCHOOL FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES DESCRIBED HIS MISSION AS "TRAINING CADRES," WITH HOPES THAT THEY WOULD RETURN TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES. (A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PROVINCIAL UNCLASSIFIED

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HASTENED TO CORRECT THE PRINCIPAL, HOWEVER, CLAIMING THAT THE OBJECTIVE WAS TO PROVIDE GENERAL EDUCATION AS WELL AS CADRE TRAINING; ONLY ABOUT 60 PCT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES END UP AS CADRES, HE NOTED.) BEGINNING WITH ONLY 40 STUDENTS IN 1982, THE SCHOOL'S CURRENT 400 STUDENTS REPRESENT ALL EIGHT ETHNIC GROUPS FROM THE PROVINCE, PRIMARILY TAY, AND HAVE ABOUT A 50/50 MALE/FEMALE RATIO. TEACHERS ARE PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE, HOWEVER. ABOUT 30 PCT GO ON TO STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL, WITH ABOUT 5-7 PCT AT ONE OF THE THREE CENTRAL-LEVEL UNIVERSITIES. "ALMOST ALL" STUDENTS EVENTUALLY RETURN TO THEIR HOME AREAS, HE CLAIMED, ALTHOUGH MANY MIGHT RATHER STAY IN THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OR ANOTHER LARGER CITY BUT CANNOT FIND EMPLOYMENT.

112. (U) THE CAO BANG SCHOOL BEGAN TEACHING ENGLISH IN 1997, BUT STILL DOES NOT OFFER ANY COMPUTER TRAINING; THE ONLY COMPUTER IS IN THE MAIN SCHOOL OFFICE, THE PRINCIPAL ADMITTED. HE NOTED THAT HE WAS "APPLYING" FOR MONEY TO OBTAIN 30-40 COMPUTERS AND HIRE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TEACHERS, WITH A "HOPE" OF ACHIEVING THIS GOAL IN 2003 OR 2004. (THE PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVE AT THE MEETING WAS NOTICEABLY SILENT REGARDING PROSPECTS FOR THIS REQUEST.) HE NOTED THAT VOCATIONAL CLASSES AT THE SCHOOL WERE "MANDATORY" BUT

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SIPDIS

STUDENTS COULD CHOOSE WHICH COURSE TO FOLLOW. HE STRESSED THAT THERE WERE "NO SOCIAL PROBLEMS" AT THE SCHOOL DESPITE THE MIXING OF THE SEXES -- NO HIV/AIDS, NO PREMARITAL SEX, NO THEFT -- AND THAT ALL DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS GOT ALONG WELL. GIRLS AND BOYS SLEPT IN DIFFERENT BUILDINGS, WITH

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EVENING GUARDS AND CURFEWS. DORMITORY ROOMS WERE BASIC, WITH 8-10 BEDS (BUNK-BED STYLE) AND NO DESKS OR CUPBOARDS. THREE MEALS A DAY ARE OFFERED IN A COMMON AREA AND WERE FREE, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE AT THE SCHOOL (INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE CHANGE OF CLOTHING PER YEAR). STUDENTS ALSO RECEIVED FUNDS TO RETURN TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES AT TET AND DURING THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS, HE ADDED.

POOR BAC KAN

113. (U) THE MAIN CLAIM TO FAME NOWADAYS OF BAC KAN, WHICH BECAME A SEPARATE PROVINCE ONLY IN 1997, IS AS THE HOMETOWN OF COMMUNIST PARTY OF VIETNAM GENERAL SECRETARY NONG DUC MANH. ACCORDING TO PROVINCIAL VICE CHAIRMAN NONG VAN LENH, ABOUT 32 PCT OF BAC KAN FAMILIES STILL LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL, ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO REDUCE THIS BY ABOUT 5 PCT PER YEAR. SEPARATELY, THE DIRECTOR OF THE PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING NOTED THAT AT LEAST 19 PCT OF BAC KAN'S 74,00-PLUS STUDENTS SUFFERED FROM MALNUTRITION, DOWN FROM 40 PCT ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO. (A USDA-FUNDED PROGRAM CARRIED OUT BY LAKE O'LAKES PROVIDES SOME WELCOME ASSISTANCE AT ABOUT 124 SCHOOLS, BENEFITING OVER 40,000 STUDENTS.)

114. (U) VICE CHAIRMAN LENH STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PLACES ON EDUCATION, INCLUDING 4 DISTRICT-LEVEL AND ONE PROVINCIAL-LEVEL BOARDING HIGH SCHOOLS (WITH A TOTAL OF 1,128 STUDENTS IN THE 2002-2003 SCHOOL YEAR), AS WELL AS 828 STUDENTS IN FOUR DISTRICT-LEVEL

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JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS. TEACHERS ARE GIVEN SPECIAL PAY TO GO TO REMOTE AND MOUNTAINOUS AREAS (ABOUT 75 PCT BONUS FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS, AND 40 PCT FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS), HE NOTED. HE CLAIMED THAT 99 PCT OF ELEMENTARY AGE STUDENTS WERE NOW IN SCHOOL (THE EDUCATION CHIEF SEPARATELY CLAIMED ONLY 97 PCT), WITH A PROVINCIAL GOAL OF UNIVERSAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY 2005 (AHEAD OF THE NATIONAL GOAL).

114. (U) VICE CHAIRMAN LENH ADMITTED THAT "BASICALLY, ALL EDUCATION WAS IN VIETNAMESE," WITH NO SPECIFIC PLANS TO USE LOCAL LANGUAGES. MANY TEACHERS ONLY STAY IN REMOTE LOCATIONS FOR ABOUT 3 YEARS BEFORE ROTATING TO MORE DESIRABLE LOCATIONS, HE NOTED, CITING "NUMEROUS DIFFICULTIES." HE POINTED TO SOME DIFFERENCES IN OUTLOOK, CLAIMING THAT "THOSE ETHNIC MINORITIES WHO HAVE MORE CONTACT WITH KINH SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION." GIRLS IN BAC KAN ARE MORE APT TO STUDY LONGER THAN BOYS, HE ADDED, ALTHOUGH THE PRIMARY LIMITATIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION ARE NOT ATTITUDINAL BUT RATHER RELATED TO DISTANCE AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING.

115. (U) THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR ADMITTED THAT FINDING QUALIFIED TEACHERS REMAINED A PERENNIAL PROBLEM, AS DO BUDGETARY LIMITATIONS. ONLY ABOUT 35 SCHOOLS HAVE LIBRARIES, HE NOTED, WHILE "VERY FEW" HAVE ANY SORT OF COMPUTER TRAINING. THERE IS ONLY ONE VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTER IN THE PROVINCE (TRAINING BARBERS, MECHANICS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, ETC.), WITH "PLANS" TO SET UP "ONE OR TWO MORE" IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, HE ADDED.

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116. (U) BAC KAN'S SOLE SENIOR HIGH BOARDING SCHOOL FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES, LOCATED ON THE SOMEWHAT DERELICT PREMISES OF THE PREVIOUS PROVINCIAL TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE (WHICH HAS AN IMPRESSIVE NEW CAMPUS NEXT DOOR) NOW HAS 300 STUDENTS (OF WHOM 184 ARE GIRLS), ACCORDING TO ITS PRINCIPAL. SIMILAR TO HIS CAO BANG EQUIVALENT, THE PRINCIPAL DESCRIBED HIS GOAL AS "BUILDING ETHNIC CADRES," WITH 1039 GRADUATES SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT IN 1991. ONLY ABOUT 50 PCT HAVE RETURNED TO WORK IN THEIR HOME VILLAGES, HE ADMITTED, ALTHOUGH ABOUT 90 PCT HAVE BECOME CADRES (PRESUMABLY, WORKING IN OTHER DISTRICTS OR AT THE PROVINCIAL-LEVEL). AS AT OTHER SCHOOLS, THE GOVERNMENT COVERS ALL EXPENSES AND PAYS FOR THE TWO TRIPS HOME EACH YEAR PER STUDENT. THERE ARE NO COMPUTERS, OR PLANS TO OBTAIN THEM IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, HE ADDED, HOWEVER.

COMMENT

117. (U) THE GVN IS CLEARLY DEVOTING SIGNIFICANT, AND INCREASING, RESOURCES TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS FAR-FLUNG ETHNIC MINORITY POPULATIONS. EQUALLY CLEAR IS THE COMMITMENT OF PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT OFFICIALS TO CARRY OUT THESE PROGRAMS, HAMPERED BY VERY REAL AND STILL

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SIPDIS

UNRESOLVED BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS. THE GVN'S COMMITMENT TO EQUALIZING THE PLAYING FIELD BETWEEN MINORITIES AND MAJORITY KINH IS NOT REFLECTED, HOWEVER, IN THE FAILURE TO PROVIDE ON A PRIORITY BASIS ITEMS SUCH AS BASIC COMPUTERS (IN CONTRAST TO REGULAR HIGH SCHOOLS VISITED ELSEWHERE ALONG THE COAST
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BETWEEN HO CHI MINH CITY AND HANOI -- SEE REF B) OR TO PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON DUAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION.
BURGHARDT

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